A Hands-On Evaluation of the BMP-3

"Spot Report!... ...Four BMPs in the open..."

by Sergeant First Class Monty A. Miller

On 9 and 10 April 1995, the scout platoon of Task Force 2-68 Armor had the unique opportunity to study the newest Russian BMP, the BMP-3. During the two days, we observed the BMP-3 firing all weapons systems, moving cross country, and sitting on static display.

Task Force 2-68 Armor deployed to Kuwait from Baumholder, Germany, for Intrinsic Action 95-2. At the same time, the Kuwaiti Army was receiving new equipment training on the BMP-3 from Russian Army trainers and civilian factory technicians.

On the morning of 9 April 1995, the task force scouts moved to the Udairi Range Complex, in the center of the Kuwaiti Desert, to link up with the Kuwaiti Army, the Russian cadre, and the BMP-3.

The first impression of the BMP-3 is that it has a relatively low silhouette for such a heavily-armed vehicle. The 100-mm main gun and the 30-mm autocannon coax present an imposing picture. After we linked up with the Kuwaitis and the Russians, we moved in for a more detailed study.

Approaching the BMP-3, we smelled the fresh paint and that brand new armored vehicle smell a soldier is lucky to experience once in a career. The Kuwaitis and Russians looked rightfully proud of their new BMP-3.

When the BMP-3s moved to their firing positions five kilometers away, the task force scouts accompanied them on the left flank. The BMP-3 has impressive pickup and excellent speed, with very little exhaust signature. The Kuwaiti forward machine gunners were sitting out of their hatches and seemed to enjoy a rather smooth ride across the desert, even at speeds of 45 mph and over.

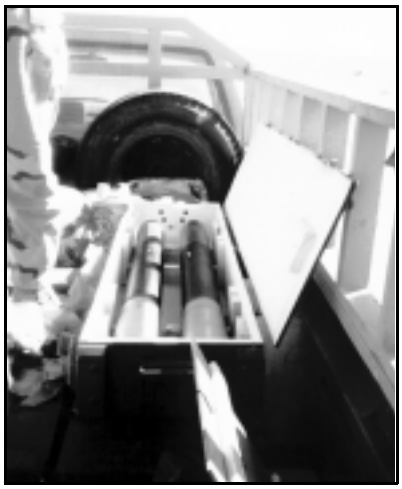
Left side view of the BMP-3. Note laser rangefinder over main gun mantlet.

At the firing positions, we received a briefing on the capabilities of the BMP-3 from the Russian trainers, while the Kuwaitis were doing their prep-to-fire checks. The interior of the BMP-3 is basically open and not compartmentalized. The left front machine gunner, the driver in his central position, and the right front machine gunner are all within arm's reach of each other. The commander's and gunner's positions in the turret are somewhat more cramped because of the main gun, coax, and autoloader, but were not uncomfortable. There is at least as much turret room as in the M2/M3 Bradley.

There is no turret shield, and crewmembers, depending on turret position, can see into and enter the turret. The dismount soldiers sit to the rear of the turret, and they are in more cramped conditions. The crew, consisting of driver, gunner, commander, and dismounts, totals nine on a fully-manned vehicle. The dismounts can stay mounted and fight under armor protection by using the firing ports on the flanks and rear door. The firing ports on the Kuwaiti BMP-3s have been modified by the Russian factory to accommodate the M16A2 rifle used by the Kuwaiti Army (see photo).

The firing of the weapons systems was most impressive. The 100-mm AT-10 laser beam-riding missile was the first round down range. Throughout the two days of firing, with 12 to 15 missiles fired, the AT-10 achieved a 100 percent hit rate. The basic load of AT-10 missiles is eight. Although it is doubtful that the warhead would be of sufficient size to take out the M1A1, it will be able to defeat the M2/M3 Bradley and the M8 Armored Gun System (AGS). The AT-10 also has a standoff advantage over the TOW II (4000m vs. 3750m) and a time of flight to maximum range advantage (12 sec/4000m vs. 16.5 sec/3750m).

The conventional main gun round is a high explosive fragmentation round and it had impressive down-range effects. This would be highly effective in



BMP-3 Details

At left, the exhaust outlet at the right rear of the BMP-3. Above left, the firing ports have been adapted to the M-16-series rifles used by Kuwait.
Above, note how the main gun, the 30-mm coax, and the laser rangefinder are mounted.
At upper right, two AT-10 laser-guided missiles that can be fired through the 100-mm main gun.
At right, two of the HE-FRAG main gun rounds.

an urban environment, as well as on the conventional battlefield, for use against soft targets and dug-in fighting positions, e.g., Bosnia-type warfare.

The 30-mm autocannon coax was also fired at targets out to 1800 meters. The rate of fire and sound of the 30mm are very similar to that of the Bradley 25mm. The only 30-mm rounds that we observed being fired were the HEI-T (High Explosive Incendiary-Tracer). The Russians seemed to be training the Kuwaitis to fire in a four-round burst with no sensing round. The Kuwaitis were achieving a 40 to 50 percent hit rate on targets at 1800 meters per burst.

There is stabilization for the turret armament and a laser rangefinder located over the main gun. A separate laser at the gunner's station is used to guide the AT-10 missile. During the two days spent observing the BMP-3, we did not see it fire on the move, so we made no conclusions on its accuracy while moving. The Kuwaiti Army is going to install the French Athos thermal sight, which will greatly increase the capabilities of the BMP-3.

The BMP-3 is amphibious, using two hydrojets in the rear and a trim vane in the front. Small skirts over the top of the track and a short snorkel to the right rear are the only other aids to amphibious operations. This is a distinct advantage over the cumbersome and bulky preparations needed for the M2/M3 Bradley. The engine mounts very low in the rear of the vehicle and the exhaust is to the right rear of the side. This will give the BMP-3 a lower heat signature across the frontal arc (see photo).

Conclusion

The low silhouette and heavy armament of the BMP-3 make it a very formidable opponent for the M2/M3 Bradley and the M8 AGS. The addition of an APFSDS-T round could further increase its lethality. A well-trained BMP-3 crew could fight extremely well with this vehicle.

As a D3-qualified scout, I would be wary of the BMP-3 on a future battlefield; however, I still feel confident that the Bradley currently can defeat it.

Just as the Russians led the world with the first infantry fighting vehicle, the BMP-1, they again lead the way in IFV thought and design with the BMP-3.

The next leap forward for infantry fighting vehicles has been taken. It's our move.

"Scouts Out!"

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